

Executive Summary/Overview

This document is the Regional Strategic Plan covering the five year period from 2004 through 2008. It articulates the most important regional environmental goals, and strategies for achieving those goals. The strategic plan mirrors the EPA national strategic plan in architecture with a goal/objective/sub-objective format.

The plan is intended to be a living, working document that changes over time. While the plan's focus is on strategic goals, this plan goes further than a simple recitation of goals. It also establishes an internal system of accountability for Region 6 managers and holds them accountable for achieving the strategic goals identified in the plan. The plan also shows how internal resources, including FTE, are tied to the goal structure. In this way Region 6 management can ensure that resources are allocated appropriately and in conformity with regional strategic goals. The Region has also tried to articulate its strong belief in collaboration and partnership in the document.

This plan was not developed in a vacuum. The Region solicited feedback from its partners, including the environmental agencies in the 5 states of Region 6. The Region also received input from 40 of the 66 tribes in Region 6, who identified their highest priorities to the Region 6 Tribal Program in a previous request. The Region has sought to incorporate the results of these discussions into both a summary section of the plan and also into the body of the document. The Region believes that further communication is needed with our partners, including those groups and agencies that we were unable to consult with in the first round of discussions. As a living document, further input into the strategic plan by our partners will be welcome.

The conversations with our partners were meaningful and helped the Region identify: key goals and strategies that we had in common with our partners, areas where the Region could directly help the partner, and also some areas where our partners did not agree with either our goal, the measurement that we established for the goal, or the strategy to accomplish the goal.

As we spoke with our partners, several joint priorities consistently emerged as themes, including:

- 1) Clean Air State Implementation Plans (SIPs) - Our states agreed that the submittal and implementation of clean air SIPs is a high priority. Several states identified the need for "timely and appropriate" EPA approval of submitted plans.
- 2) Air toxics - Region 6 states also agreed that the continuing implementation and development of air toxics programs is a high priority. States also believed that expanded monitoring in this area was needed.

3) Water Quality Standards/TMDLs - Most states supported Water Quality Standards and TMDLs as a high priority. Our tribes similarly cited water quality as a top priority. Many states also desired increased monitoring in this area. There was conflict between several states and the Agency over nutrients; some states felt that reservoirs were a higher priority than rivers and streams, or that numerical standards were improper for rivers and streams.

4) Safe Drinking Water Act implementation - Several states were concerned about implementing SDWA requirements, especially by small communities and water systems. States asked if more could be done to assist small systems, such as increased compliance assistance activities; the Region plans to make that a priority.

5) Enforcement coordination - Most states stressed the importance of even closer coordination on Agency enforcement activities. Several states also mentioned the benefit of joint enforcement and inspection activities.

6) Science - Many states believed that EPA technical and scientific expertise was not being utilized to the fullest capacity. States also mentioned a need for EPA to do a better job of communicating advances in science and technology to the states.

7) “Timely and appropriate” approval - Several states identified “timeliness of EPA reviews” as an issue, especially in relation to Clean Air Act SIPs and Water Quality Standards.

Several other issues emerged from our conversations with the states, and while they were not considered themes, they were important and the Region wanted to identify them as well. These priorities are also shared by Region 6 management:

8) Brownfields - Several states cited continuing redevelopment efforts as a priority.

9) Solid waste management - Our tribes and some states mentioned “better solid waste management” as a priority.

10) Coastal areas - One state identified the protection of coastal areas and wetlands as a high priority.

11) Tribal and environmental justice issues - Several states identified tribal and environmental justice activities as a priority, with one state saying it was a high priority.

The Region plans to continue communication with its partners regarding our goals and strategies at least on an annual basis, allowing them the opportunity to provide input and to influence those priorities. It is our belief that this process will serve as a mechanism to strengthen our relationship with our partners, and align our resources so as to achieve the greatest benefit.